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A Guide to Emerson

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A GUIDE TO EMERSON

The life of a man or woman is the story of their thoughts and actions; Ralph Waldo Emerson has therefore given us his life in his writings; and thus has he become immortal. A beautiful chaplet, gathered along the highway of life, from which, in this book, a few of the rarest flowers are plucked.

That we are here to learn, that life is a school of experience, formed the foundation of Emerson's thoughts. "The world," he writes, "exists for the education of each man. There is no age, or state of society, or mode of action in history, to which there is not somewhat corresponding in his life. Everything tends in a wonderful manner to abbreviate itself and yield its own virtue to him. He should see that he can live all history in his own person. He must sit solidly at home, and not suffer himself to be bullied by kings or empires, but know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world; he must transfer the point of view from which history is commonly read, from Rome, and Athens, and London, to himself, and not deny his conviction that he is the court, and if England or Egypt have anything to say to him, he will try the case; if not, let them forever be silent. He must attain and maintain that lofty sight

where facts yield their secret sense, and poetry and annals are alike. The instinct of the mind, the purpose of Nature, betrays itself in the use we make of the signal narrations of history. Time dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of facts. No anchor, no cable, no fences, avail to keep a fact a fact. Babylon, Troy, Tyre, Palestine, and even early Rome are passing already into fiction. The Garden of Eden, the sun standing still in Gibeon, is poetry thenceforward to all nations. Who cares what the fact was, when we have made a constellation of it to hang in heaven an immortal sign? London and Paris and New York must go the same way. 'What is history,' said Napoleon, 'but a fable agreed upon?' This life of ours is stuck round with Egypt, Greece, Gaul, England, War, Colonization, Church, Court and Commerce, as with so many flowers and wild ornaments grave and gay. I will not make more account of them. I believe in Eternity. I can find Greece, Asia, Italy, Spain, and the Islands—the genius and creative principle of each and of all eras in my own mind."

Early in life Emerson was ordained a Unitarian minister; but his liberalism extended beyond the liberalism of that cult, and he left the pulpit.

He realized the independence that money brings—"If I were richer," he writes in his Journal of 1828, "I should lead a better life than I do. The chief advantages I should propose myself in wealth would be the independence of manner and conversation it would bestow, and which I eagerly covet."

Ten years before the publication of Darwin's "Origin of Species," Emerson wrote in his book, "Nature," (1849): "I feel the centipede in me—cayman, carp, eagle and fox." He speaks of the worm "striving to be man," and of "an occult relation between the very scorpions and man." He was a naturalist, regardless of sacred writings or creeds; and discerned in Nature "that ineffable Essence which we call Spirit." He speaks of Nature as "the apparition of God." "The world," he writes, "is a divine dream from which we may presently awake to the glories and certainties of day." Emerson's transcendentalism is expressed when he speaks of Nature as "the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual and strives to lead back the individual to it." He has the highest regard for the man Jesus; but calls the interpretation of the church the "noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus. The soul knows no persons." The doctrine of mediation through Christ is classed as "this Eastern monarchy of Christianity."

"The richest romance," he writes, "the noblest fiction that was ever woven, lies enclosed in human life." In his Essay on History we read: "All inquiry into antiquity—all curiosity respecting the Pyramids, the excavated cities, Stonehenge, the Ohio Circles, Mexico, Memphis is the desire to do away with this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now. Belzoni digs and measures in the mummy-pits and pyramids of Thebes, until he can see the end of the difference between the monstrous

work and himself. When he has satisfied himself, in general and in detail, that it was made by such a person as he, so armed and so motivated, and to ends to which he himself should also have worked, the problem is solved; his thought lives along the whole line of temples, and sphinxes, and catacombs, passes through them all with satisfaction, and they live again to the mind, or are *now*."

To Emerson Nature was everything: "Upborne and surrounded as we are by this all-creating Nature, soft and fluid as a cloud or the air, why should we be such hard pedants, and magnify a few forms? Why should we make account of time, or magnitude, or of figure? The soul knows them not, and genius, obeying its law, knows how to play with them as a young child plays with graybeards and in the churches. Genius studies the casual thought, and, far back in the womb of things, sees the rays parting from one orb, that diverge ere they fall by infinite diameters. Genius watches the monad through all his masks as he performs the metempsychosis of Nature. Genius detects through the fly, through the caterpillar, through the grub, through the egg, the constant individual; through countless individuals, the fixed species; through many species, the genus; through all genera, the steadfast type; through all the kingdoms of organized life, the eternal unity. Nature is a mutable cloud, which is always and never the same. She casts the same thought into troops of forms, as a poet makes twenty fables with one moral. Through the brutality and toughness of matter,

a subtle spirit bends all things to its own will. The adamant streams into soft but precise form before it, and, whilst I look at it, its outline and texture are changed again. Nothing is so fleeting as form; yet never does it quite deny itself. In man we still trace the remains or hints of all that we esteem badges of servitude in the lower races; yet in him they enhance his nobleness and grace; as Io, in Aeschylus, transformed to a cow, offends the imagination; but how changed, when as Isis in Egypt she meets Osiris-Jove, a beautiful woman, with nothing of the metamorphosis left but the lunar horns as the splendid ornament of her brows! . . .

"Nature is full of a sublime family likeness throughout all her works; and delights in startling us with resemblances in the most unexpected quarters. I have seen the head of an old sachem of the forest, which at once reminded the eye of a bald mountain summit, and the furrows of the brow suggested the strata of the rock. There are men whose manners have the same essential splendor as the simple and awful sculpture of the friezes of the Parthenon, and the remains of the earliest Greek art. And there are compositions of the same strain to be found in the books of all ages. What is Guido's *Rospigliosi Aurora* but a morning thought, as the horses in it are only a morning cloud. If any one will but take pains to observe the variety of actions to which he is equally inclined in certain moods of mind, and those to which he is averse, he will see how deep is the chain of affinity."

Emerson felt the social change that is to

come. In his address, "Man the Reformer," given at Boston before the Library Association of Mechanics' Apprentices, he said: "We are to revise the whole of our social structure, the state, the school, religion, marriage, trade, science;" he declared that "the manual labor of society ought to be shared among all its members," and that "a man should have a farm or mechanical craft for his culture." In a coming society he follows Plato—"The Wise Man (the man of character) is the State;" and then he passes Plato—"The appearance of Character makes the state unnecessary."

"There is a time," Emerson writes, "in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide Universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. . . . A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace."

Of free thought and self-reliance Emerson says: "Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser,

who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, 'What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?' my friend suggested,—'But these impulses may be from below, not from above.' I replied, 'They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil.'

"No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition, as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he. I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions."

"The strongest influences in his development," writes one of Emerson's biographers, "were the liberating philosophy of Coleridge, the mystical visions of Swedenborg, the intimate poetry of Wordsworth, and the stimulating essays of Carlyle."

In 1832 Emerson went to Europe, almost for the special purpose of meeting Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle and Wordsworth. "His visit to Carlyle," says his biographer, "in the lonely farmhouse at Craigenputtock, was the memorable beginning of a lifelong friendship. . . . Emerson was a sweet-tempered Carlyle, living in the sunshine. Carlyle was a militant Emerson, moving amid thunderclouds."

On his voyage home from this visit Emerson wrote in his Diary: "A man contains all that

is needful to his government within himself." "All real good or evil that can befall him must be from himself." "There is a correspondence between the human soul and everything that exists in the world; more properly, everything that is known to man. Instead of studying things without, the principles of them all may be penetrated into within him." "The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint man with himself." "The highest revelation is that God is in every man."

Like Franklin, Emerson believed that a wise man might often change his mind; that only a fool never did. He said: "I wish to say what I feel and think today, with the proviso that tomorrow perhaps I shall contradict it all." Perhaps this was exemplified in the Abolition days. In 1844 Emerson wrote of the Wise Man, that he "needs no army, fort or navy—he loves men too well." In 1856 he writes, "I think we must get rid of slavery, or we must get rid of freedom." With the outbreak of the Civil War he became an ardent and powerful supporter of the Union. James Russell Lowell says of Emerson during this period: "To him more than to all other causes did the young martyrs of our Civil War owe the sustaining strength of thoughtful heroism that is so touching in every record of their lives."

Writing of Swendenborg, whose religious ideas made so great an impression upon him, Emerson says:

"He was a scholar from a child, and was educated at Upsala. At the age of twenty-eight he was made Assessor of the Board of Mines

(Sweden), by Charles XII. In 1716, he left home for four years, and visited the universities of England, Holland, France, and Germany. He performed a notable feat of engineering in 1718, at the siege of Fredericshall, by hauling two galleys, five boats, and a sloop some fourteen English miles overland, for the royal service. In 1721 he journeyed over Europe, to examine mines and smelting works. He published in 1716 his 'Drederus Hyperboreus,' and from this time for the next thirty years was employed in the composition and publication of his scientific works.

"In 1743, when he was fifty-four years old, what is called his illumination began. He ceased to publish any more scientific books, withdrew himself from his practical labors, and devoted himself to the writing and publication of his voluminous theological works, which were printed at his own expense or that of the Duke of Brunswick, or other prince, at Dresden, Leipsic, London, or Amsterdam. . . . The clergy interfered a little with the importation and publication of his religious works; but he seems to have kept the friendship of men in power. He was never married. He had great modesty and gentleness of bearing. His habits were simple; he lived on bread, milk and vegetables; and he lived in a house situated in a large garden. . . .

"The genius which was to penetrate the science of the age with a far more subtle science; to pass the bounds of space and time; venture into the dim spirit-realm, and attempt to establish a new religion in the world,—began

its lessons in quarries and forges, in the smelting-pot and crucible, in ship-yards and dissecting rooms. . . . He anticipated much science of the nineteenth century; anticipated, in astronomy, the discovery of the seventh planet—but, unhappily, not also of the eighth; anticipated the views of modern astronomy in regard to the generation of the earth by the sun; in navigation, some important experiments and conclusions of later students; in chemistry, the atomic theory; in anatomy, the discoveries of Schlichting, Monro, and Wilson; and first demonstrated the office of the lungs. . . . A colossal soul, he lies vast abroad on his times, uncomprehended by them, and requires a long local distance to be seen. . . .

“The thoughts in which he lived, were the universality of each law in Nature; the Platonic doctrine of the scale or degrees; the version or conversion of each into the other; the fine secret that little explains large, and large little; the centrality of man in Nature, and the connection that subsists throughout all things; he saw that the human body was strictly universal, or an instrument through which the soul feeds and is fed by the whole of matter; so that he held, in exact antagonism to the skeptics, that ‘the wiser a man is, the more will he be a worshiper of the Deity.’ In short he was a believer in the identity-philosophy, which he held not idly, as the dreamers of Berlin or Boston, but which he experimented with and established through years of labor, with the heart and strength of the rudest Viking that his rough Sweden ever sent to battle.

"This theory dates from the oldest philosophy, and derives perhaps its best illustration from the newest. It is this: That Nature iterates her means perpetually on successive planes. In the old aphorism, Nature is always self-similar. In the plant, the eye or germinative point opens to a leaf, then to another leaf, with the power of transforming the leaf into radicle, stamen, pistil, petal, bract, sepal, or seed. The whole art of the plant is still to repeat leaf on leaf without end, the more or less of heat, light, moisture and food, determining the form it shall assume. In the animal, Nature makes a vertebra, or a spine of vertebrae, and helps herself by a new spine, with a limited power of modifying its form,—spine on spine, to the end of the world.

"A poetic anatomist, in our own day, teaches that a snake, being a horizontal line, and man, being an erect line, constitute a right angle; and, between the lines of this mystical quadrant, all animated beings find their place; and he assumes the hair-worm, the span-worm, or the snake, as the type or prediction of the spine.

"Manifestly, at the end of the spine, Nature puts out smaller spines, as arms; at the end of the arms, new spines, as hands; at the other end she repeats the process, as legs and feet. At the top of the column, she puts out another spine, which doubles or loops itself over, as a span-worm, into a ball, and forms the skull, with extremities again; the hands being now the upper jaw, the feet the lower jaw, the fingers and toes being represented this time

by upper and lower teeth. This new spine is destined to high uses. It is a new man on the shoulders of the last. It can almost shed its trunk, and manage to live alone, according to the Platonic idea in the *Timaeus*. Within it, on a higher plane, all that was done in the trunk repeats itself.

"Nature recites her lesson once more in a higher mood. The mind is a finer body, and resumes its functions of feeding, digesting, absorbing, excluding, and generating, in a new and ethereal element. Here, in the brain, is all the process of alimentation repeated, in the acquiring, comparing, digesting, and assimilating of experience. Here again is the mystery of generation repeated. In the brain are male and female faculties; here is marriage, here is fruit.

"And there is no limit to this ascending scale, but series on series. Everything, at the end of one use, is taken up into the next, each series punctually repeating every organ and process of the last. We are adapted to infinity. We are hard to please, and love nothing which ends; and in Nature is no end; but everything, at the end of one use, is lifted into a superior, and the ascent of these things climbs into demonias and celestial natures. Creative force, like a musical composer, goes on unweariedly repeating a simple air or theme, ten thousand times reverberated, till it fills earth and heaven with the chant. . . .

"The 'Animal Kingdom' is a book of wonderful merits. It was written with the highest end—to put science and the soul, long

estranged from each other, at one again. It was an anatomist's account of the human body, in the highest style of poetry. Nothing can exceed the bold and brilliant treatment of a subject usually so dry and repulsive. Swedenborg saw Nature 'wreathing through an everlasting spiral, with wheels that never dry, on axles that never creak,' and sometimes sought 'to uncover those secret recesses where Nature is sitting at the fires in the depths of her laboratory;' whilst the picture comes recommended by the hard fidelity with which it is based on practical anatomy. . . . He knows, if he only, the flowing of Nature, and how wise was that old answer of Amasis to him who bade him drink upon the sea—'Yes, willingly, if you will stop the rivers that flow in.' Few knew as much about Nature and her subtle manners, or expressed more subtly her goings. He thought as large a demand is made on our faith by Nature, as by miracles. He noted that in 'her proceeding from first principle through her several subordinations, there was no state through which she did not pass, as if her path lay through all things. . . . For as often as she betakes herself upward from visible phenomena, or, in other words, withdraws herself inward, she instantly, as it were, disappears, while no one knows what has become of her, or whither she is gone; so that it is necessary to take science as a guide in pursuing her steps.'"

"To what a painful perversion," concludes Emerson, "had Gothic theology arrived, that Swedenborg admitted no conversion for evil

spirits! But the divine effort is never relaxed; the carrion in the sun will convert itself to grass and flowers; and man, though in brothels, or jails, or gibbets, is on his way to all that is good and true." And at another place he writes: "The destiny of organized Nature is amelioration, and who can tell its limits? Whilst he lives, to scatter the seeds of science and of song, that climate, corn, animals, men, may be milder, and the germs of love and benefit may be multiplied."

Emerson believed in living in the Present—not in the Past, nor in the Future. He writes: "Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.

"Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied, and it satisfies nature, in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with Nature in the present, above time.

"This should be plain enough. Yet see what

strong intellects dare not yet hear God himself, unless he speak the phraseology of I know not what David, or Jeremiah, or Paul. We shall not always set so great a price on a few texts, on a few lives. We are like children who repeat by rote the sentence of grandames and tutors, and, as they grow older, of the men of talents and character they chance to see—painfully recollecting the exact words they spoke; afterwards, when they come into the point of view which those had who uttered these sayings, they understand them, and are willing to let the words go; for, at any time, they can use words as good when occasion comes. If we live truly, we shall see truly. It is as easy for the strong man to be strong, as it is for the weak to be weak. When we have new perception, we shall gladly disburden the memory of its hoarded treasure as old rubbish."

"Nature," writes Emerson, "suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul."

And again: "We must go alone. . . . Why should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood, and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or

folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it.

"But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual; that is, must be elevation. At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at once at thy closet door, and say, 'Come out unto us.' But keep thy state; come not into their confusion. The power men possess to annoy me, I give them by a weak curiosity. No man can come near to me but through my act."

In something of an anarchistic mood Emerson declares: "Truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity, and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster. High be his heart, faithful his will, clear his sight, that he may in good earnest be doctrine, society, law to himself, that a simple purpose may be to him as strong as iron necessity is to others!"

To Emerson, All is One, and the soul in All. In his sketch of Plato he says: "The Same, the Same; friend and foe are of one stuff; the plowman, the plow, and the furrow, are of one stuff; and the stuff is such, and so much, that the variations of forms are unimportant."

He quotes the words of the Hindu divinity, Krishna, spoken to the sage: "You are fit to apprehend that you are not distinct from me. That which I am, thou art; and that also is this world, with its gods, and heroes, and mankind. Men contemplate distinctions, because they are stupefied with ignorance. . . . The

words 'I' and 'mine' constitute ignorance. What is the great end of all, you shall now learn from me. It is Soul—one in all bodies, pervading, uniform, perfect, pre-eminent over Nature, exempt from birth, growth and decay, omnipresent, made up of true knowledge, independent, unconnected with unrealities, with name, species, and the rest, in time past, present, and to come. The knowledge that this spirit, which is essentially one, is in one's own, and in all other bodies, is the wisdom of one who knows the unity of things. As one diffusive air, passing through the perforations of a flute, is distinguished as the notes of a scale, so the nature of the Great Spirit is single, though its forms be manifold, arising from the consequences of acts. When the difference of the investing form, as that of a god, or the rest, is destroyed, there is no distinction. . . . The whole world is but a manifestation of Vishnu, who is identical with all things, and is to be regarded by the wise, as not differing from, but as the same as themselves. I neither am going nor coming; nor is my dwelling in any one place; nor art thou, thou; nor are others, others; nor am I, I."

It is "as if he had said," writes Emerson, "All is for the soul, and the soul is Vishnu; and animals and stars are transient painting; and light is whitewash; and durations are deceptive; and form is imprisonment and heaven itself a decoy."

Emerson thus analyzes: "If speculation tends thus to a terrific unity, in which all

things are absorbed, action tends directly backwards to diversity. The first is the course of gravitation of mind; the second is the power of Nature. Nature is manifold. The unity absorbs, and melts or reduces. Nature opens and creates. These two principles reappear and interpenetrate all things, all thought; the one, the many. The one is being, the other intellect; one is necessity, the other freedom; one rest, the other motion; one power, the other distribution; one strength, the other pleasure; one consciousness, the other definition; one genius, the other talent; one earnestness, the other knowledge; one possession, the other trade; one caste, the other culture; one king, the other democracy; and, if we dare carry these generalizations a step higher, and name the last tendency of both, we might say that the end of the one is escape from organization—pure science; and the end of the other is the highest instrumentality, or use of means, or executive deity."

To Plato, Emerson pays the highest tribute: "A balanced soul was born, perceptive of the two elements. It is as easy to be great as to be small. The reason why we do not at once believe in admirable souls, is because they are not in our experience. In actual life they are so rare as to be incredible; but, primarily, there is not only no presumption against them, but the strongest presumption in favor of their appearance. But whether voices were heard in the sky, or not; whether his mother or his father dreamed that the infant man-child was

the son of Apollo; whether a swarm of bees settled on his lips, or not; a man who could see two sides of a thing was born. The wonderful synthesis so familiar in Nature; the upper and the under side of the medal of Jove; the union of impossibilities, which reappears in every object; its real and its ideal power, was now, also, transferred entire to the consciousness of man.

"The balanced soul came. If he loved abstract truth, he saved himself by propounding the most popular of all principles, the absolute good, which rules rulers, and judges the judge. If he made transcendental distinctions, he fortified himself by drawing all his illustrations from sources disdained by orators and polite conversers; from mares and puppies; from pitchers and soup-ladles; from cooks and criers; the shops of potters, horse-doctors, butchers, and fishmongers. He cannot forgive in himself a partiality, but is resolved that the two poles of thought shall appear in his statement. His argument and his sentence are self-poised and spherical. The two poles appear; yes, and become two hands, to grasp and appropriate their own. * * *

"His strength is like the momentum of a falling planet; and his discretion, the return of its due and perfect curve—so excellent is his Greek love of boundary, and his skill in definition. In reading logarithms one is not more secure than in following Plato in his flights. Nothing can be colder than his head, when the lightnings of his imagination are playing in the sky. He has finished his thinking, before he

brings it to the reader; and he abounds in the surprises of a literary master. He has that opulence which furnishes at every turn the precise weapon he needs. As the rich man wears no more garments, drives no more horses, sits in no more chambers than the poor; but has that one dress, or equipage, or instrument, which is fit for the hour and the need; so Plato, in his plenty, is never restricted, but has the fit word. There is, indeed, no weapon in all the armory of wit which he did not possess and use—epic, analysis, mania, intuition, music, satire, irony, down to the customary and polite. His illustrations are poetry and his jests illustrations. Socrates' profession of obstetric art is good philosophy; and his finding of that word 'cookery,' and 'adulatory art,' for rhetoric, in the *Gorgias*, does us a substantial service still. No orator can measure in effect with him who can give good nicknames. * * *

"Plato apprehended the cardinal facts. He could prostrate himself on the earth, and cover his eyes, while he adored that which cannot be numbered, or gauged, or known, or named; that of which everything can be affirmed and denied; that 'which is entity and nonentity.' He called it super-essential. He even stood ready, as in the *Parmenides*, to demonstrate that it was so—that this Being exceeded the limits of intellect. No man ever more fully acknowledged the Ineffable. Having paid his homage, as for the human race, to the Illimitable, he then stood erect, and for the human race affirmed, 'And yet things are knowable!'

—that is, the Asia in his mind was first heartily honored—the ocean of love and power, before form, before will, before knowledge, the Same, the Good, the One; and now, refreshed and empowered by this worship, the instinct of Europe, namely, culture, returns; and he cries, Yet things are knowable! They are knowable, because, being from one, things correspond. There is a scale; and the correspondence of heaven to earth, or matter to mind, of the part to the whole, is our guide. As there is a science of stars, called astronomy; a science of quantities, called mathematics; a science of qualities, called chemistry; so there is a science of sciences—I call it Dialectic—which is the intellect discriminating the false and the true. It rests on the observation of identity and diversity; for, to judge, is to unite to an object the notion which belongs to it. The sciences, even the best—mathematics and astronomy, are like sportsmen, who seize whatever prey offers, even without being able to make any use of it. Dialectic must teach the use of them. * * *

"I announce to men the Intellect. I announce the good of being interpenetrated by the Mind that made Nature: this benefit, namely, that it can understand Nature *while* it made and maketh. Nature is good, but Intellect is better; as the law-giver is before the law-receiver. I give you joy, O sons of men! that truth is altogether wholesome; that we have hope to search out what might be the very self of everything."

Emerson quotes the passage from Plato

found in the *Timaeus*, where he indicates the highest employment of the eyes: "By us it is asserted that God invented and bestowed sight on us for this purpose: That, on surveying the circles of the intelligence of the heavens, we might properly employ those of our own minds, which, though disturbed when compared with the others that are uniform, are still allied to their circulations; and that, having thus learned, and being naturally possessed of a correct reasoning faculty, we might, by imitating the uniform revolutions of divinity, set right our own wanderings and blunders."

Emerson closes his sketch of Plato in these words: "These things we are forced to say, if we must consider the effort of Plato, or of any philosopher, to dispose of Nature—which will not be disposed of. No power of genius has ever yet had the smallest success in explaining existence. The perfect enigma remains. But there is an injustice in assuming this ambition for Plato. Let us not seem to treat with flippancy his venerable name. Men, in proportion to their intellect, have admitted his transcendent claims. The way to know him, is to compare him, not with Nature, but with other men. How many ages have gone by, and he remains unapproached! A chief structure of human wit, like Karnak, or the mediaeval cathedrals, or the Etrurian remains, it requires all the breadth of human faculty to know it. I think it is truest seen, when seen with the most respect. His sense deepens, his merits multiply with study. When we say, here is a fine collection of fables; or, when

we praise the style; or the common sense; or arithmetic; we speak as boys, and much of our impatient criticism of the dialectic, I suspect, is no better. The criticism is like our impatience of miles, when we are in a hurry; but it is still best that a mile should have seventeen hundred and sixty yards. The great-eyed Plato proportioned the lights and shades after the genius of our life."

Ever does Emerson propound the doctrine of self-reliance. He believes in action, not supplication. "Prayer that craves a particular commodity—anything less than all good—is vicious." With Emerson "prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view." It is "the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul;" but "prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in Nature and consciousness." When a man "is at one with God, he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action." To Emerson, Effort is prayer: "The prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of the oar, are true prayers, heard throughout Nature."

"Another sort of false prayers," writes Emerson, "are our regrets. Discontent is the want of self-reliance; it is the infirmity of will. Regret calamities, if you can thereby help the sufferer; if not, attend to your own work, and already the evil begins to be repaired. Our sympathy is just as base. We come to them who weep foolishly, and sit down and cry for company, instead of imparting to them truth

and health in rough electric shocks, putting them once more in communication with their own reason. The secret of fortune is joy in our hands. Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are flung wide; him all tongues greet, all honors crown, all eyes follow with desire. Our love goes out to him and embraces him, because he did not need it. We solicitously and apologetically caress and celebrate him, because he held on his way and scorned our disapprobation. The gods love him because men hated him. 'To the persevering mortal,' said Zoroaster, 'the blessed immortals are swift.'"

"Insist on yourself," declares Emerson; "never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession."

Regarding society and social institutions, Emerson writes: "Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not.".... "Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is Christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For everything that is given, something is taken. Society acquires new arts, and loses old instincts. What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil, and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property

is a club, a spear, a mat, and an undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under! But compare the health of the two men, and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength. If the traveler tell us truly, strike the savage with a broad-ax, and in a day or two the flesh shall unite and heal as if you struck the blow into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white man to his grave."

The reliance on wealth, on property, says Emerson, is a lacking of self-reliance: "And so the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance. Men have looked away from themselves and at things so long, that they have come to esteem the religious, learned, and civil institutions as guards of Property, and they deprecate assaults on these, because they feel them to be assaults on Property. They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is. But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature. Especially he hates what he has, if he see that it is accidental—came to him by inheritance, or gift, or crime; then he feels that it is not having; it does not belong to him, has no root in him, and merely lies there because no revolution or no robber takes it away. But that which a man is, does always by necessity acquire, and what the man acquires is living property, which does not wait the beck of rulers, or mobs, or revolutions, or fire, or storm, or bankruptcies, but perpetually renews itself wherever the man breathes. 'Thy lot or portion of life,' said the

Caliph Ali, 'is seeking after thee; therefore be at rest from seeking after it.'"

Emerson calls Compensation the "law" that "writes the laws of cities and nations." He uses the old Greek proverb—"The dice of the gods are always loaded." "It is in vain to build or plot or combine against it. Things refuse to be mismanaged long. Though no checks to a new evil appear, the checks exist, and will appear. If the government is cruel, the governor's life is not safe. * * * This is the ancient Greek doctrine of Nemesis, who keeps watch in the universe, and lets no offense go unchastized. The Furies, they said, are attendants on justice, and if the sun in heaven should transgress his path, they would punish him. The poets related that stone walls, and iron swords, and leathern thongs, had an occult sympathy with the wrongs of their owners; that the belt which Ajax gave Hector dragged the Trojan hero over the field at the wheels of the car of Achilles, and the sword which Hector gave Ajax was that on whose point Ajax fell. They recorded that when the Thasians erected a statue to Theagenes a victor in the games, one of his rivals went to it by night, and endeavored to throw it down by repeated blows, until at last he moved it from its pedestal; and was crushed to death beneath its fall. * * *

"All things are double, one against another. —Tit for tat; an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth; blood for blood; measure for measure; love for love.—Give and it shall be given you. —He that watereth shall be watered himself.—

What will you have? quoth God; pay for it and take it.—Nothing venture, nothing have.—Thou shalt be paid exactly for what thou hast done, no more, no less.—Who doth not work shall not eat.—Harm watch, harm catch.—Curses always recoil on the head of him who imprecates them.—If you put a chain around the neck of a slave, the other end fastens itself around your own.—Bad counsel confounds the adviser.—The Devil is an ass. It is thus-written, because it is thus in life. * * *

“You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong. ‘No man had ever a point of pride that was not injurious to him,’ said Burke. The exclusive in fashionable life does not see that he excludes himself from enjoyment. in the attempt to appropriate it. The exclusionist in religion does not see that he shuts the door of heaven on himself in striving to shut out others. Treat men as pawns and ninepins, and you shall suffer as well as they. If you leave out their heart, you shall lose your own. * * *

“All the old abuses in society, universal and particular, all unjust accumulations of property and power, are avenged in the same manner. Fear is an instructor of great sagacity, and the herald of all revolutions. One thing he teaches, that there is rottenness where he appears. He is a carrion crow, and though you see not well what he hovers for, there is death somewhere. Our property is timid, our laws are timid, our cultivated classes are timid. Fear for ages has boded and mowed and gibbered over government and property. That obscene

bird is not there for nothing. He indicates great wrongs which must be revised. * * *

"The history of persecution is a history of endeavors to cheat Nature, to make water run up hill, to twist a rope of sand. It makes no difference whether the actors be many or one, a tyrant or a mob. A mob is a society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason, and traversing its work. The mob is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast. Its fit hours of activity is night. Its actions are insane like its whole constitution. It persecutes a principle; it would whip a right; it would tar and feather justice, by inflicting fire and outrage upon the houses and persons of those who have these....The martyr cannot be dishonored. Every lash inflicted is a tongue of fame; every prison a more illustrious abode; every burned book or house enlightens the world; every suppressed or expunged word reverberates through the earth from side to side."

To Emerson, the universe is guided by a higher will than the human—by Spiritual Laws. Emerson is a deist. He writes: "A little consideration of what takes place around us every day would show us that a higher law than that of our will regulates events; that our painful labors are unnecessary and fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous actions are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine. Belief and love—a believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care. O my brothers, God exists. There is a Soul at the center of Nature, and over the will

of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe. It has so infused its strong enchantment into nature, that we prosper when we accept its advice, and when we struggle to wound its creatures our hands are glued to our sides, or they beat our own breasts. * * *

"Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment. Then you put all gainsayers in the wrong. Then you are the world, the measure of right, of truth, of beauty. If we will not be marplots with our miserable interferences, the work, the society, letters, arts, science, religion of men would go on far better than now, and the heaven predicted from the beginning of the world, and still predicted from the bottom of the heart, would organize itself, as do now the rose, and the air, and the sun. * * *

"Dreadful limits are set in Nature to the powers of dissimulation. Truth tyrannizes over the unwilling members of the body. Faces never lie, it is said. No man need be deceived who will study the changes of expression. When a man speaks the truth in the spirit of truth, his eye is as clear as the heavens. When he has base ends, and speaks falsely, the eye is muddy and sometimes askew.... Confucius exclaimed, 'How can a man be concealed! How can a man be concealed!' * * *

"We are the photometers, we the irritable goldleaf and tinfoil that measure the accumulations of the subtle element. We know the

authentic effects of the true fire through every one of its million disguises."

Emerson, in his Essay on Love, calls it "the passion" that "rebuilds the world for youth." It is that which "makes all things alive and significant. Nature grows conscious. Every bird on the boughs of the tree sings now to his heart and soul....Behold there in the wood the fine madman! He is a palace of sweet sounds and sights; he dilates; he is twice a man; he walks with arms akimbo; he soliloquises; he accosts the grass and trees; he feels the blood of the violet, the clover, and the lily in his veins; and he talks with the brook that wets his foot....The lover cannot paint his maiden to his fancy poor and solitary. Like a tree in flower, so much soft, budding, informing loveliness is society for itself, and she teaches his eye why Beauty was pictured with Loves and Graces attending her steps. Her existence makes the world rich. Though she excludes all other persons from his attention as cheap and unworthy, she indemnifies him by carrying out her own being into somewhat impersonal, large, mundane, so that the maiden stands to him for a representative of all select things and virtues. For that reason the lover never sees personal resemblances in his mistress to her kindred or to others. His friends find in her a likeness to her mother, or her sisters, or to persons not of her blood. The lover sees no resemblance except to summer evenings and diamond mornings, to rainbows and the song of birds."

From the one-love Emerson passes on to the all-love, and follows the "fine madman" "in the wood" to the larger life and larger perception: "Then he passes from loving them in one to loving them in all, and so is the one beautiful soul only the door through which he enters to the society of all true and pure souls. In the particular society of his mate, he attains a clearer sight of any spot, any taint, which her beauty has contracted from this world, and is able to point it out, and this with mutual joy that they are now able, without offense, to indicate blemishes and hindrances in each other, and give to each all help and comfort in curing the same. And, beholding in many souls the traits of divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which is divine from the taint which it has contracted in the world, the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of the Divinity, by steps on the ladder of created souls.

"Somewhat like this have the truly wise told us of love in all ages. The doctrine is not old, nor is it new. If Plato, Plutarch and Apuleius taught it, so have Petrarch, Angelo and Milton. It awaits a truer unfolding in opposition and rebuke to that subterranean prudence which presides at marriages with words that take hold of the upper world, whilst one eye is prowling in the cellar, so that its gravest discourse has a savor of hams and powdering-tubs. Worst, when this sensualism intrudes into the education of young women, and withers the hope and affection of human nature by teaching that mar-

riage signifies not ing but a housewife's thrift, and that woman's life has no other aim."

On Friendship, Emerson analyzes: "Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed. The lover, beholding his maiden, half knows that she is not verily that which he worships; and in the golden hour of friendship we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief. We doubt that we bestow on our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation. In strictness, the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. In strict science all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness. Shall we fear to cool our love by mining for the metaphysical foundation of this Elysian temple? Shall I not be as real as the things I see? If I am, I shall not fear to know them for what they are. Their essence is not less beautiful than their appearance, though it needs finer organs for its apprehension. The root of the plant is not unsightly to science, though for chaplets and festoons we cut the stem short. And I must hazard the production of the bald fact amidst these pleasing reveries, though it should prove an Egyptian skull at our banquet. A man who stands united with his thought conceives magnificently of himself. He is conscious of a universal success, even though bought by uniform particular failures. No advantages, no powers, no gold or force, can be any match for him. I cannot choose but rely on my own poverty more than on your wealth. I cannot make your consciousness tantamount

to mine. Only the star dazzles; the planet has a faint, moon-like ray. I hear what you say of the admirable parts and tried temper of the party you praise, but I see well that for all his purple cloaks I shall not like him, unless he is at last a poor Greek like me. I cannot deny it, O friend, that the vast shadow of the Phenomenal includes thee also in its pied and painted immensity—thee, also, compared with whom all else is shadow. Thou art not Being, as Truth is, as Justice is—thou art not my soul, but a picture and effigy of that. Thou hast come to me lately, and already thou art seizing thy hat and cloak. Is it not that the soul puts forth friends as the tree puts forth leaves, and presently, by the germination of new buds, extrudes the old leaf? The law of Nature is alternation for evermore. Each electrical state superinduces the opposite. The soul environs itself with friends, that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; and it goes alone for a season, that it may exalt its conversation or society.”

And so, as to Friendship, Emerson draws his own conclusion: “I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them. We must have society on our own terms, and admit or exclude it on the slightest cause. I cannot afford to speak much with my friend. If he is great, he makes me so great that I cannot descend to converse. In the great days, presentiments hover before in the firmament. I ought then to dedicate myself to them. I go in that I may seize them, I go out that I may

seize them. I fear only that I may lose them receding into the sky in which now they are only a patch of brighter light. Then, though I prize my friends, I cannot afford to talk with them and study their visions, lest I lose my own. It would indeed give me a certain household joy to quit this lofty seeking, this spiritual astronomy, or search of stars, and come down to warm sympathies with you; but then I know well I shall mourn always the vanishing of my mighty gods. It is true, next week I shall have languid moods, when I can well afford to occupy myself with foreign objects; then I shall regret the lost literature of your mind, and wish you were by my side again. But if you come, perhaps you will fill my mind only with new visions, not with yourself but with your lustres, and I shall not be able any more than now to converse with you. So I will owe to my friends this evanescent intercourse. I will receive from them, not what they have, but what they are. They shall give me that which properly they cannot give, but which emanates from them. But they shall not hold me by any relations less subtle and pure. We will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not."

Writing on the "Uses of Great Men," Emerson critically observes: "Great men—the word is injurious. Is there caste? Is there fate? What becomes of the promise to virtue? The thoughtful youth laments the superfoetation of Nature. 'Generous and handsome,' he says, 'is your hero; but look at yonder poor Paddy, whose country is his wheelbarrow; look at his

whole nation of Paddies.' Why are the masses, from the dawn of history down, food for knives and powder? The idea dignifies a few leaders, who have sentiment, opinion, love, self-devotion; and they make war and death sacred;—but what for the wretches whom they hire and kill? The cheapness of man is every day's tragedy. It is as real a loss that others should be low, as that we should be low; for we must have society."

We are born to attain independence—"On, and forever onward! The microscope observes a monad or wheel-insect among the infusories circulating in water. Presently, a dot appears on the animal, which enlarges to a slit, and it becomes two perfect animals. The ever-proceeding detachment appears not less in all thought, and in society. Children think they cannot live without their parents. But, long before they are aware of it, the black dot has appeared, and the detachment taken place. Any accident will now reveal to them their independence."

To Emerson "the heroes of the hour" are but "relatively great." They are "of a faster growth; or they are such in whom at the moment of success, a quality is ripe which is then in request. Other days will demand other qualities. Some rays escape the common observer, and want a finely adapted eye. Ask the great man if there be none greater. His companions are; and not the less great, but the more, that society cannot see them. Nature never sends a great man into the planet, without confiding the secret to another soul."

What, then, is the benefit in contemplation of the great? Emerson writes: "One gracious fact emerges from these studies—that there is true ascension in our love. The reputations of the nineteenth century will one day be quoted to prove its barbarism. The genius of humanity is the real subject whose biography is written in our annals. We must infer much, and supply many chasms in the record. The history of the universe is symptomatic, and life is mnemonical. No man, in all the procession of famous men, is reason or illumination, or that essence we were looking for; but is an exhibition, in some quarter, of new possibilities. Could we one day complete the immense figures which these flagrant points compose! The study of many individuals leads us to an elemental region wherein the individual is lost, or wherein all touch by their summits. Thought and feeling, that break out there, cannot be impounded by any fence of personality.

"This is the key to the power of great men—their spirit diffuses itself. A new quality of mind travels by night and by day, in concentric circles from its origin, and publishes itself by unknown methods; the union of all minds appears intimate; what gets admission to one, cannot be kept out of any other; the smallest acquisition of truth or of energy, in any quarter, is so much good to the commonwealth of souls....The genius of humanity is the right point of view of history. The qualities abide; the men who exhibit them have now more, now less, and pass away; the qualities remain on another brow....

"For a time, our teachers serve us personally, as metres or milestones of progress. Once they were angels of knowledge, and their figures touched the sky. Then we drew near, saw their means, culture and limits; and they yielded their place to other geniuses. Happy, if a few names remain so high that we have not been able to read them nearer, and age and comparison have not robbed them of a ray. But at last we shall cease to look in men for completeness, and shall content ourselves with their social and delegated quality. All that respects the individual is temporary and prospective, like the individual himself, who is ascending out of his limits into a catholic existence. We have never come at the true and best of any genius, so long as we believe him an original force. In the moment when he ceases to help us as a cause, he begins to help us more as an effect. Then he appears as an exponent of a vaster mind and will. The opaque self becomes transparent with the light of the First Cause."

In his Essay on "The Over-Soul" Emerson reaches the summit of his transcendentalism: "We grant that human life is mean; but how did we find out that it was mean? What is the ground of this uneasiness of ours; of this old discontent? What is the universal sense of want and ignorance, but the fine, innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claim? Why do men feel that the natural history of man has never been written, but he is always leaving behind what you have said of him, and it be-

comes old, and books of metaphysics worthless? The philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there has always remained, in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence. The most exact calculator has no prescience that somewhat incalculable may not balk the very next moment. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine.

"As with events, so it is with thoughts. When I watch that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me, I see that I am a pensioner; not a cause, but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up, and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien the visions come.

"The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great Nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his

tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and becomes wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE.

“And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith. Every man’s words, who speaks from that life, must sound vain to those who do not dwell in the same thought on their own part. I dare not speak for it. My words do not carry its august sense; they fall short and cold. Only itself can inspire whom it will, and behold! their speech shall be lyrical, and sweet, and universal as the rising of the wind. Yet I desire, even by profane words, if I may not use sacred, to indicate the heaven of this deity, and to report what hints I have collected of the transcendent simplicity and energy of the Highest Law. * * *

"All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and will; is the background of our being, in which they lie—an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man—the eating, drinking, planting, counting man—does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect; but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his will, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims, in some one particular, to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey. * * *

"Humanity shines in Homer, in Chaucer, in Spenser, in Shakespeare, in Milton. They are content with truth. They use the positive degree. They seem frigid and phlegmatic to those who have been spiced with the frantic passion and violent coloring of inferior, but popular writers. For they are poets by the free course which they allow to the informing soul,

which through their eyes beholds again, and blesses the things which it hath made. The soul is superior to its knowledge, wiser than any of its works. The great poet makes us feel our own wealth, and then we think less of his compositions. His best communication to our mind is to teach us to despise all he has done.

"Shakespeare carries us to such a lofty strain of intelligent activity as to suggest a wealth which beggars his own; and we then feel that the splendid works which he has created, and which in other hours we extol as a sort of self-existent poetry, take no stronger hold of real nature than the shadow of a passing traveler on the rock. The inspiration which uttered itself in Hamlet and Lear could utter things as good from day to day forever. Why, then, should I make account of Hamlet and Lear, as if we had not the soul from which they fell as syllables from the tongue?"

"What is the hardest task in the world?" asks Emerson; and he answers, "To think."

"I would put myself," he says, "in the attitude to look in the eye an abstract truth, and I cannot. I flinch and withdraw on this side and on that. . . . We say, I will walk abroad, and the truth will take form and clearness to me. We go forth, but cannot find it. It seems as if we needed only the stillness and composed attitude of the library to seize the thought. But we come in, and are as far from it as at first."

Does thinking alone, then, answer our ques-

tions? Emerson denies it. He says: "Then, in a moment, and unannounced, the truth appears. A certain wandering light appears, and is the distinction, the principle we wanted. But the oracle comes because we had previously laid siege to the shrine. It seems as if the law of the intellect resembled that law of Nature by which we now inspire, now expire the breath; by which the heart now draws in, then hurls out the blood—the law of undulation. So now you must labor with your brains, and now you must forbear your activity, and see what the great Soul showeth."

Emerson declares that "we are all wise; the difference between persons is not in wisdom, but in art." "Each truth that a writer acquires is a lantern, which he turns full on what facts and thoughts lay already in his mind, and behold all the mats and rubbish which had littered his garret become precious. Every trivial fact in his private biography becomes an illustration of this new principle, revisits the day, and delights all men by its piquancy and new charm. Men say, Where did he get this? And think there was something divine in his life. But no; they have myriads of facts just as good, would they only get a lamp to ransack their attics withal."

He illustrates: "If you gather apples in the sunshine, or make hay, or hoe corn, and then retire within doors, and shut your eyes, and press them with your hand, you shall still see apples hanging in the bright light, with boughs and leaves thereto, or the tasseled grass or the corn-flags, and this for five or six hours after-

wards. There lie the impressions on the retentive organ, though you know it not. So lies the whole series of natural images with which your life has made you acquainted in your memory, though you know it not, and a thrill of passion flashes light on their dark chamber, and the active power seizes instantly the fit image, as the word of its momentary thought."

He becomes bold in comparison—"Perhaps if we should meet Shakespeare, we should not be conscious of any steep inferiority; no; but of great equality—only that he possessed a strange skill of using, of classifying his facts, which we lacked."

The mind can have "its choice," says Emerson, "between truth and repose." "Take which you please—you can never have both. Between these, as a pendulum, man oscillates. He in whom the love of repose predominates will accept the first creed, the first philosophy, the first political party he meets—most likely his father's. He gets rest, commodity, and reputation; but he shuts the door of truth. He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings, and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism, and recognize all the opposite negations, between which, as walls, his being is swung. He submits to the inconvenience of suspense and imperfect opinion; but he is a candidate for truth, as the other is not, and respects the highest law of his being. The circle of the green earth he must measure with his shoes to find the man who can yield him truth. He shall then know that there is something more blessed and great

in hearing than in speaking. Happy is the hearing man; unhappy the speaking man. As long as I hear the truth, I am bathed by a beautiful element, and am not conscious of any limits to my nature. The suggestions are thousandfold that I hear and see. The waters of the great deep have ingress and egress to the soul."

Of the poet, Emerson says that his "sign and credentials are that he announces that which no man foretold." "He is the true and only doctor; he knows and tells; he is the only teller of news, for he was present and privy to the appearance which he describes."

And yet, "poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word, or a verse, and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. The men of more delicate ear write down these cadences more faithfully, and these transcripts, though imperfect, become the songs of the nations."

How imperfect sometimes these transcripts, and how disappointing, is expressed by Emerson, in his own experience: "With what joy I begin to read a poem, which I confide in as an inspiration! And now my chains are to be broken; I shall mount above these clouds and opaque airs in which I live—opaque, though they seem transparent—and from the heaven of truth I shall see and comprehend my relations. That will reconcile me to life, and

renovate nature, to see trifles animated by a tendency, and to know what I am doing. Life will no longer be a noise; now I shall see men and women, and know the signs by which they may be discerned from fools and satans. This day shall be better than my birthday; then I became an animal; now I am invited into the science of the real.

"Such is the hope, but the fruition is postponed. Oftener it falls, that this winged man, who will carry me into the heaven, whirls me into mists, then leaps and frisks about with me as it were from cloud to cloud, still affirming that he is bound heavenward; and I, being myself a novice, am slow in perceiving that he does not know the way into the heavens, and is merely bent that I should admire his skill to rise, like a fowl or a flying-fish, a little way from the ground or the water; but the all-piercing, all-feeding, and ocular air of heaven, that man shall never inhabit. I tumble down again soon into my old nooks, and lead the life of exaggerations as before, and have lost my faith in the possibility of any guide who can lead me thither where I would be."

And yet—"the melodies of the poet ascend, and leap, and pierce into the deeps of infinite time. So far the bard taught me, using his freer speech. But Nature has a higher end, in the production of new individuals, than security; namely, ascension, or the passage of the soul into higher forms."

"The poet," says Emerson, "knows that he speaks adequately, only when he speaks somewhat wildly, or 'with the flower of the mind';

not with the intellect, used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service, and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life; or, as the ancients were wont to express themselves, not with the intellect alone, but with the intellect inebriated by nectar.

"As the traveler who has lost his way throws his reins on his horse's neck, and trusts to the instinct of the animal to find his road, so must we do with the divine animal who carries us through this world. For if in any manner we can stimulate this instinct, new passages are opened for us into Nature, the mind flows into and through things hardest and highest, and the metamorphosis is possible. This is the reason why bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandal-wood and tobacco, or whatever other procurers of animal exhilaration."

"The poets," decides Emerson, become—for a time, at least—"liberating gods."

"The ancient British bards had for the title of their order, 'Those who are free throughout the world.' They are free, and they make free; . . . nations, times, systems, enter and disappear, like threads in tapestry of large figure and many colors; dream delivers us to dream, and while the drunkenness lasts we will sell our bed, our philosophy, our religion, in our opulence."

And yet with all his dreams, or his drunkenness, Emerson loves the poets—loves Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Raphael—and exclaims: "O poet! a new nobility is conferred in groves and pastures, and not in castles, or by the

sword-blade, any longer. The conditions are hard, but equal. Thou shalt leave the world, and know the muse only. Thou shalt not know any longer the times, customs, graces, politics, or opinions of men, but shall take all from the muse. For the time of towns is tolled from the world by funeral chimes, but in Nature the universal hours are counted by succeeding tribes of animals and plants, and by growth of joy on joy. God wills also that thou abdicate a manifold and duplex life, and that thou be content that others speak for thee. Others shall be thy gentlemen, and shall represent all courtesy and wordly life for thee; others shall do the great and resounding actions also. Thou shalt lie close hid with Nature, and carst not be afforded to the Capitol or Exchange. The world is full of renunciations and apprenticeships, and this is thine; thou must pass for a fool and a churl for a long season. This is the screen and sheath in which Pan has protected his well-beloved flower, and thou shalt be known only to thine own, and they shall console thee with tenderest love. And thou shalt not be able to rehearse the names of thy friends in thy verse, for an old shame before the holy ideal. And this is thy reward: That the ideal shall be real to thee, and the impressions of the actual world shall fall like summer rain, copious, but not troublesome, to thy invulnerable essence. Thou shalt have the whole land for thy park and manor, the sea for thy bath and navigation, without tax and without envy; the woods and the rivers thou shalt own; and thou shalt

possess that wherein others are only tenants and boarders. Thou true land-lord! sea-lord; air-lord! Wherever snow falls, or water flows, or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds, or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love, there is Beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee; and though thou shouldst walk the world over thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble."

To Emerson,—as to all great thinkers—the world is a School of Experience. "Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness—these are the threads on the loom of Time, these are the lords of Life."

"Where do we find ourselves?" he asks. "In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday. Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glitter. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghostlike we glide through Nature, and should not know our place again.

. . . All our days are so unprofitable while they pass, that 'tis wonderful where or when we ever get anything of this which we call wisdom, poetry, virtue. We never get it on any dated calendar day. Some heavenly days must have been intercalated somewhere, like those that Hermes won with dice of the Moon, that Osiris might be born. . . .

"There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit. The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is. . . . The Indian who was laid under a curse, that the wind should not blow on him, nor water flow to him, nor fire burn him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop. Nothing is left us now but death. We look at that with a grim satisfaction, saying, there at least is reality that will not dodge us. . . .

"Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus. From the mountain you see the mountain. We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate. . . . The secret of the illusoriness is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand. . . . We need change of objects. Dedication to one thought is quickly odious. We house

with the insane, and must humor them; then conversation dies out.

"Once I took such delight in Montaigne that I thought I should not need any other book; before that, in Shakespeare; then in Plutarch; then in Plotinus; at one time in Bacon; afterwards in Goethe; even in Bettine; but now I turn the pages of either of them languidly, whilst I still cherish their genius. . . .

"The plays of children are nonsense, but very educative nonsense. So it is with the largest and solemnest things, with commerce, government, church, marriage, and so with the history of every man's bread, and the ways by which he has come by it. Like a bird which alights nowhere, but hops perpetually from bough to bough, is the Power which abides in no man and in no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one and for another moment from that one. . . . The results of life are uncalculated and incalculable. The years teach much which the days never know. . . . When I converse with a profound mind, or if at any time being alone I have good thoughts, I do not at once arrive at satisfactions, as, when being thirsty, I drink water, or go to the fire, being cold; no! but I am at first apprised of my vicinity to a new and excellent region of life. By persisting to read or think, this region gives further sign of itself, as it were in flashes of light, in sudden discoveries of its profound beauty and repose, as if the clouds that covered it parted at intervals, and showed the approaching traveler the inland mountains, with the tranquil eternal

meadows spread at their base, whereon flocks graze, and shepherds pipe and dance.

"But every insight from this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; I arrive there, and behold what was there already. I make! Oh, no! I clap my hands in infantine joy and amazement before the first opening to me of this august magnificence, old with the love and homage of innumerable ages, young with the life of life, the sunbright Mecca of the desert."

"The Chinese Mencius," writes Emerson, "has not been the least successful in his generalization. 'I fully understand language,' he said, 'and nourish well my vast-flowing vigor.'—'I beg to ask what you call vast-flowing vigor?' said his companion. 'The explanation,' replied Mencius, 'is difficult. This vigor is supremely great, and in the highest degree unbending. Nourish it correctly, and do it no injury, and it will fill up the vacancy between heaven and earth. This vigor accords with and assists justice and reason, and leaves no hunger.'"

"We dress our garden, eat our dinners, discuss the household with our wives, and these things make no impression, are forgotten next week; but in the solitude to which every man is always returning, he has a sanity and revelations, which in his passage into new worlds he will carry with him. Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat; up again, old heart!—it seems to say, there is victory yet for all justice; and the true romance which the world

exists to realize, will be the transformation of genius into practical power."

* * *

In his last days, at Concord, "his character," writes one of Emerson's biographers, "remained serene and unshaken in dignity. Steady, tranquilly, cheerfully, he finished the voyage of life."

"I trim myself to the storm of time,
I man the rudder, reef the sail,
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime:

"Lowly faithful, banish fear,
Right onward drive unharmed;
The port, well worth the cruise, is near,
And every wave is charmed.'"

















